

Is America Planning An Unprovoked Nuclear Attack on China?

Saturday, August 3, 2013 11:04

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This is an edited abridgement by Lasha Darkmoon of Professor Amitai Etzioni's ground-breaking article in the *Yale Journal of International affairs*, [Who Authorized Preparations for War with China?](#) It is followed by extracts from Paul Craig Roberts' impassioned [response](#) to the same article. Additional comments by Dick Eastman and Lasha Darkmoon. This important material has been condensed to roughly one-fifth of its original length.

AMITAI ETZIONI: The Pentagon has concluded that the time has come to prepare for war with China. It is a momentous conclusion, a momentous decision that so far has failed to receive a

thorough review from elected officials, namely the White House and Congress. This important change in the United States' posture toward China has largely been driven by the Pentagon.

The decision at hand stands out even more prominently because (a) the change in military posture may well lead to an arms race with China, which could culminate in a nuclear war; and (b) the economic condition of the United States requires a reduction in military spending, not a new arms race.

Have the White House and Congress properly reviewed the Pentagon's approach—and found its threat assessment of China convincing? If not, what are the United States' overarching short- and long-term political strategies for dealing with an economically and militarily rising China?

Since the Second World War the United States has maintained a power-projection military, built upon forward deployed forces with uninhibited access to the global commons—air, sea, and space. For over six decades the maritime security of the Western Pacific has been underwritten by the unrivaled naval and air power of the United States. Starting in the early 1990s, however, Chinese investments in sophisticated, but low-cost, weapons—including anti-ship missiles, short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, stealth submarines, and cyber and space arms—began to challenge the military superiority of the United States, especially in China's littoral waters.

These “asymmetric arms” threaten two key elements of the United States' force projection strategy: its **fixed bases**, such as those in Japan and Guam, and **aircraft carriers**. These Chinese arms are viewed by some in the Pentagon as raising the human and economic cost of the United States' military role in the region to prohibitive levels. To demonstrate what this new environment means for regional security, military officials point out that, in 1996, when China conducted a series of missile tests and military exercises in the Strait of Taiwan, the United States responded by sending two aircraft carriers to the South China Sea, a credible display of force that reminded all parties of its commitment to maintaining the status quo in the region.

However, these analysts point out, if in the near future China decided to forcefully integrate Taiwan, the same U.S. aircraft carriers that are said to have once deterred Chinese aggression could be denied access to the sea by PLA anti-ship missiles. Thus, the U.S.'s interests in the region, to the extent that they are undergirded by superior military force, are increasingly vulnerable.

Two influential American military strategists, Andrew Marshall and his protégé Andrew Krepinevich, have been raising the alarm about China's new capabilities and aggressive designs since the early 1990s.

LD: By China's "aggressive designs", he means China's decision to defend itself against American aggression. The mere fact that American ships are patrolling the Chinese coast, and not Chinese ships patrolling the American coast, makes it quite clear who the real aggressor is.

Building on hundreds of war games played out over the past two decades, they gained a renewed hearing for their concerns following Pacific Vision, a war game conducted by the U.S. Air Force in October 2008.

With Marshall's guidance, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates instructed the Chiefs of Staff to begin work on the **AirSea Battle (ASB) project** and, in September of 2009 . . . a classified Memorandum of Agreement was signed allowing the US "to counter growing challenges to US freedom of action."

In late 2011 Gates' successor, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, also signed off on the ASB and formed the new Multi-Service Office to Advance AirSea Battle. Thus, ASB was conceived, born, and began to grow.

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